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## Re-articulating the New *Mestiza*

By Zalfa Feghali

### Abstract

This essay provides an overview, critique, and the beginning of a refiguration of Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of the new *mestiza* as set out in her seminal 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. By examining both Anzaldúa's precursors and the articulations of hybrid identities of her contemporaries, this essay depicts the complex dynamic that characterizes the *mestiza*'s need to develop, beyond borders and attempts to fashion a more contemporary, transnational *mestiza*. Using the writing and criticism of Françoise Lionnet alongside Anzaldúa's and other critics, and utilizing postcolonial and feminist theories, this essay hopes to provide an alternative articulation to conventional understandings of hybridity and *mestizaje* in contemporary thought.

*Keywords:* United States borderlands, hybridity, *mestiza*

### Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to provide an overview, a critique, and the beginning of a refiguration of Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of the new *mestiza*. Anzaldúa's *mestiza* exists in borderlands, and is "neither *hispana india negra española / ni gabacha*,"<sup>1</sup> rather, she is "*mestiza, mulata*, half-breed / caught in the crossfire between camps / while carrying all five races on [her] back / not knowing which side to turn to, run from" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 216). However, according to Anzaldúa, and despite the difficulties engendered by her very existence, the *mestiza* is also a figure of enormous potential, as her multiplicity allows a new kind of consciousness to emerge. This *mestiza* consciousness moves beyond the binary relationships and dichotomies that characterize traditional modes of thought, and seeks to build bridges between all minority communities in order to achieve social and political change. Anzaldúa locates the new *mestiza* consciousness at a site that, as Françoise Lionnet suggests, "is not a territory staked out by exclusionary practices" ("The Politics and Aesthetics of *Métissage*" 5).

Although there are clear precursors to Anzaldúa's work, one of which I discuss at length below, many critics and thinkers choose her work to engage with. This has to do with her unique place in the "canon" of Chicana/Mexican American writing – what she calls the "Moveimento Macha." Writing from the position(s) of queer Chicana womanhood, code-switching between English and Spanish, and mixing poetry and prose, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, at the time of publication in 1987, represented an important break from the mainly male-dominated pool of "traditional" Chicano writers<sup>2</sup> and inspired a generation of women, Chicana and non-Chicana alike, to write about their experiences as border-crossers with hybrid identities. Anzaldúa's work remains popular because it retains much of its original subversive potential, its cross-disciplinarity providing new and varied methodologies to analyze borders. In many ways, it has also played an important role in refocusing American studies as a transnational discipline. In her presidential address to the American Studies Association in 2004, Shelley Fisher

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<sup>1</sup> Basically translated as "[neither] Hispanic, Indian, Black, Spanish / nor white".

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Rudolfo Anaya, Americo Paredes, and Rolando Hinojosa Smith.

Fishkin identified Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* as epitomizing the transnational nature of American studies, and credited her work for opening up a space for "American studies scholars [to] increasingly recognize that understanding requires looking beyond the nation's borders, and understanding how the nation is seen from vantage points beyond its borders" ("Crossroads of Cultures" 20).

Anzaldúa's work, much like Anzaldúa herself, is also able to blur the boundaries of a range of different theoretical approaches and contexts, including postcolonial, feminist, border, and queer theories, in addition to other disciplines including sociology and anthropology. Gita Rajan and Radhika Mohanram, for example, have noted how

"[...] recent critical focus has shifted from exile and diaspora to borders, and the crossing and recrossing of physical, imaginative, linguistic, and cultural borders" and see Anzaldúa's work as "largely responsible for this new direction in postcolonial studies" ("Introduction" 5).

Anzaldúa's formulation of the new *mestiza* finds its roots in José Vasconcelos' theory of "a cosmic race" and attempts to move beyond this theory to bring the new *mestiza* to light. To do this, Anzaldúa adopts Vasconcelos' formulation and moulds a creation story for the new *mestiza*:

At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly 'crossing over,' this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural, and biological cross-pollination, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making – a new *mestiza* consciousness (99).

Anzaldúa sees this new *mestiza* consciousness crossing all borders and effacing all social constructions of identity, history, language, race, sexuality, and gender. Not only is this a figure of hope, it is also one of distinct political potential, capable of identifying with other *mestiza* figures (read hybrid identities) and oppressions. Most importantly to Anzaldúa, the *mestiza* has an interest in forming solid alliances and unlikely partnerships on the basis of a shared experience of marginality and oppression. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa chooses to focus on two somewhat different kinds of oppression that impact the Chicana/o subject: first, and more generally, the oppression perpetrated by Anglos, or whites on non-whites. The second, the oppression of women by men in Chicano/a society, is seen as a corollary and effect of white oppression as Chicano men oppress their women.

### A "Cosmic Race"

In his original essay of 1925, Vasconcelos lauds the people inhabiting the area of Mexico for their mestizo/a culture, which, as Rafael Pérez-Torres has put it, "locates itself within a complex third space neither Mexican nor American but in a transnational space of both potential and restraint" ("Alternate Geographies and the Melancholy of Mestizaje" 322). In its traditional meaning, *mestizaje* "reflects a simultaneously racial, sexual, and national memory, an embodiment of colonization and conquest" (Bost,

*Mulattas and Mestizas* 9). In fact, one of the reasons that Jose Vasconcelos won popular acclaim for his theories was the attractiveness of the idea that an entire population, which literally embodies a history of violence, can forge an identity that moved beyond such a violent history – and flourish. Anzaldúa herself refers to this very specific history in her hope that the emergence of the new *mestiza* will bring an end to rape, violence, and war.

For the purposes of his essay, Vasconcelos sees this group as the first stage in the creation of a new, cosmic race that will eventually take on characteristics and subsume genetic streams from all the races on earth. This cosmic race will take on the best or most desirable traits from each respective race. Eventually, according to Vasconcelos, the lines between the “original” races will blur to the point that any one individual’s “racial heritage” would be completely indistinguishable from another’s, thus becoming the ultimate *mestizo/a* (something akin what critics would now call a “post-ethnic” or “post-racial” world). This emphasis on the special character and potential of the *mestiza/o* Mexican subject has made Vasconcelos’ theory very attractive to Mexican and Chicano/a activists, particularly nationalists. As many Chicano/a activists have done, Anzaldúa uses a narrow interpretation of Vasconcelos’ essay in the hope of finding a solid theoretical grounding for her own project. However, this has brought her much criticism, as Vasconcelos’ theory has been rigorously undermined. As Didier Jaén puts it:

It is true that *mestizaje* is one of the central concepts of the Vasconcelos essay, but of course, it is also clear that the racial mixture Vasconcelos refers to is much wider, much more encompassing, than what can be understood by the *mestizaje* of the Mexican or Chicano... But even if we expand the concept of *mestizaje* to include all other races, this biological mixture would not fulfill what Vasconcelos expresses with the idea of the Cosmic race (“Introduction” xvi).

Clearly, Vasconcelos’ utopian vision of *mestizaje* leading to a new, privileged subject that lives in a race-less world does not hold up theoretically or pragmatically. For example, he clearly delineates the “four major races of the world” before envisioning a fifth, cosmic race which embraces the four “original” races of the world. Despite the fact that the original text was written in 1925 and must be read with one eye trained on that time’s theoretical and scientific reach, it is problematic in the way it combines scientific language and terms with a more mystical outlook (something that is echoed in Anzaldúa’s work, albeit for a different purpose). It thus presents itself as scientific fact and knowledge while in fact holding little or no solid scientific basis.<sup>3</sup>

My main objection to Vasconcelos’ analysis comes from the implications of his own underlying premise, namely, that there are four races of humans: the Black, the Indian (as in American native), the Mongol, and the White. Out of these four races, Vasconcelos imagines that the fifth, *mestizo*, cosmic race will resemble a symphony:

Voices that bring accents from Atlantis; depths contained in the pupil of the red man, who knew so much, so many thousand years ago, but now seems to

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<sup>3</sup> Some would say it deliberately masquerades as scientific – although I do not necessarily agree that Vasconcelos was deliberately trying to misrepresent his ideas. See for example, Didier T. Jaén’s introduction to the bilingual edition.

have forgotten everything. His soul resembles the old Mayan *cenote* of green waters, laying deep and still...This infinite quietude is stirred with the drop put in our blood by the Black, eager for sensual joy, intoxicated with dances and unbridled lust...There also appears the Mongol, with the mystery of his slanted eyes that see everything according to a strange angle...The clear mind of the White, that resembles his skin and his dreams, also intervenes...

Clearly Vasconcelos' theory is based on fundamental racism on his part. Yet despite having borne heavy criticism for his theory, Vasconcelos' essay was reprinted in 1948 and became a rallying point for Chicano activist and Mexican nationalist movements. In addition to Vasconcelos' popularity as an alternative Mexican historian, this is most likely why Anzaldúa espouses his theory. However, as I plan to show, Anzaldúa's work also falls into many of the same traps as Vasconcelos'. It has been important to look at Vasconcelos' work in such depth as I will show that Anzaldúa's work, while in many ways vastly different, may have the effect of re-inscribing Vasconcelos' racism.

Indeed, this re-inscription is evident when Anzaldúa seems to preclude the possibility of forming alliances or having sympathy with whites, despite her attempts to unite all *mestiza* identities everywhere under an umbrella of mutual 'inbetween-ness.' In fact, over the course of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa builds up the white or the Anglo as a monolithic entity that she blames for abuses and infractions against borderlanders, Mexicans, and minority groups. Directly addressing "white society", Anzaldúa writes: "We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need to you own the fact that you looked upon us as less human, that you stole our lands, our person-hood, our self respect" (107). Anzaldúa uses two pronouns to refer to two groups: "we" and "you". Naming all white society as "you" casts it as one whole entity that can be generalized in one word. Recall however, that Anzaldúa identifies as a part of an emerging new *mestiza* consciousness and community, which strives to move beyond simple dualistic thinking and endeavors to "act and not react" (101). This important contradiction lies at the heart of Anzaldúa's analysis.

Besides Anzaldúa's construction of this white "enemy", to which I return below, she neglects to address the multiplicity that also characterizes whiteness. It is unlikely that she is unaware of whiteness as an object of study, particularly as it moves away from being cast as "invisible."<sup>4</sup> As Ian F. Haney Lopez reflects, "being White is not a monolithic or homogenous experience, either in terms of race, other social identities,

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<sup>4</sup> Here, a survey of whiteness studies is necessary but beyond the scope of this short piece. As there are many different approaches to studying whiteness (the legal perspective, ethnicity studies, etc) it is actually quite difficult to choose one or two "foundational texts." More contemporary places to start would be Ian F. Haney Lopez's *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* or George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. Matt Wray has written two books on "white trash": *Not Quite White: White Trash and The Boundaries of Whiteness* and *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. For the Mexican American perspective on this, Laura Gomez's *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* and George Sanchez's *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* are very useful.

space, or time. Instead, Whiteness is contingent, changeable, partial, inconstant, and ultimately, social” (*White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* xiv). However, it is important to point out that even if Anzaldúa is in fact innocent of ignoring the emerging field of whiteness studies (which is entirely plausible given that *Borderlands* was written in 1987, around the same time that the first studies on whiteness are emerging), her work shows traces of using very same exclusionary logic she critiques when she thinks about whiteness and whites. While I do not deny that whiteness in the US was and is still, at least to a certain degree, undifferentiated and normative (particularly from the perspective of non-whites), it is still important to be aware of the way that Anzaldúa ultimately reproduces several of the “white practices” that she objects to.

If this is in fact what Anzaldúa’s work does, then she is ignoring her own advice to the new *mestiza* community, despite the fact that she believes dualistic thinking can only reproduce the status quo. She reminds her readers that “A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed”, and seems convinced that “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once...” (*Borderlands* 100). Indeed she later writes: “The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts” (102). It could be argued that Anzaldúa is attempting to heal this split through naming it – but it is not enough to reconcile the important contradictions that characterize her formulation of the new *mestiza*. Note, however, that Anzaldúa identifies a “split” as the fundamental building block of the plurality of “our” many lives, languages, and thoughts – yet presents “our” culture as singular. The underlying assumption here is that culture is the same for both “the white race and the colored race.” What is needed is a theorization of the relationship between race and culture – something that Anzaldúa does not provide but could have proven very useful to her argument.<sup>5</sup>

### Locating Anzaldúa’s Border

Another critique and limitation of Anzaldúa’s conception of the new *mestiza* figure is that she equates the physical experience of living in the borderlands with the emotional and spiritual experiences of other, more abstract borderlands. In this vein, Pablo Vila provides a cogent argument warning against making an easy equivalence between the two, which would serve to homogenize the border, as if there were only one border identity, border culture, or process of hybridization. I think, instead, that the reality of the border [...] goes well beyond that consecrated figure of border studies, the border crosser. [...] That is, the confusion of the American side of the border with the border itself, the essentialization of the cultures that meet in the border encounter [...] and the tendency to confuse the sharing of a culture with the sharing of an identity (*Border Identifications* 4).

It is Vila’s last two comments that I feel are most evident in Anzaldúa’s account, with regard to the way she attempts to transpose her analysis of a physical border area with borders that cannot be physically defined, as in for example, the borders of ethnicity. While my analysis also looks at these borders, I try not to equate them so simply so as not

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<sup>5</sup> There is more work to be done on this relationship. Anzaldúa’s claim that all different races are of one culture could be described as her own brand of humanism, for example.

to lose sight of what makes them different.

Vila's critique also has particular implications on the way Anzaldúa sees whites. An interesting point, however is that the only whites Anzaldúa does not dismiss as potential allies are those who are homosexuals.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, she recognizes that within whiteness there is inequality – it is as a result of marginalization, among other things, that the homosexual is able to identify and “link people with each other – the Blacks with Jews with Indians with Asians with whites with extraterrestrials” (*Borderlands* 106). In another connection to Vila, it is also clear that Anzaldúa blurs the distinction between being part of a culture and sharing in that identity, as I noted above. This is also evident in her use of the word “Gringo.” In fact, many on the Mexican side of the border would accuse Anzaldúa of not having the right to use the word “Gringo”, given her position with relation to the border.<sup>7</sup> Equally important in this context is Anzaldúa's appropriation of the *indigena*. Anzaldúa reclaims the *indigena* as the Indian part of her own *mestizaje*, and names it as a source and inspiration for her own resistance to oppression. In including the *indigena* in her analysis, Anzaldúa critiques Chicano/a society for denying the indigenous part of *mestizaje*. Yet this *indigena* is never elaborated on: Anzaldúa reclaims the *indigena* but does not explain what she is reclaiming, exhibiting once again her tendency to lean towards essentialized identities. While she clearly writes with an intention of inclusivity, she is unwittingly conveying a message that could be construed to be equally problematic as those essentializing and racist groups that she is writing against.

This is perhaps because of Anzaldúa's own location. Despite the fact that her analysis is rooted in the borderlands, she does not address the fact that she is, whether or not she likes it, writing from the US side of the border. As such, she perhaps unconsciously falls prey to the trappings of privilege and theory, which could make her text as questionable and problematic as any other US text about the border. As Socorro Tabuenca notes: “In Anzaldúa's text...the geographic border and the relationships between Mexico and the United States are essentialized. In it, US whites are presented as “them” and minorities as “us.”... The border culture according to Anzaldúa, is also a metaphorical culture narrated from the vantage point of the First World” (qtd. in Vila *Ethnography at the Border* 311). Tabuenca is not trying to deny the importance of studying the “privileged” side of the border; rather, his suggestion is that the border should be studied from both sides, simultaneously. Accordingly, this analysis should hold true for both physical and psychic borders.

Anzaldúa also speaks from the vantage point of the multiply oppressed; as a non-white, queer woman, she is very conscious of the fact that “the dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, [and] caged...colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, [and] by her own people” (*Borderlands* 44). While Anzaldúa names the source of this colonization as male hegemony, she seems to be comparatively flexible towards this male dominance (particularly in the borderlands) than towards as white dominance.

In fact, Anzaldúa does not use the same exclusionary logic I identified above against men, who she identifies as another major source of domination of and against the *mestiza*. She does of course bear witness to the many sites of oppression of women by

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<sup>6</sup> Anzaldúa uses the term “homosexual” to refer to both gay men and lesbians.

<sup>7</sup> However, this attack only serves to reinforce Anzaldúa's point about living in borderlands and not being accepted on either side or by either group.

both Anglo and non-Anglo men, and correctly identifies that culture, society, and their rules are products of the male hierarchal network of oppression from the outset. As she puts it, “dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through culture. Culture is made by those in power – men” (38). Ultimately, however, she recognizes, as Sonia Saldivar-Hull has put it, that “rules are manmade and can be unmade with feminist logic” (“Introduction” 4). In this recognition is a space reserved for moving beyond the male-female binary. Re-assessing man-made rules with feminist logic does not mean the rules will now be made by women – rather, she takes it to mean that they will be fair and balanced to both sides. Why then, can Anzaldúa not reserve this same space for moving beyond white versus non-white relations?

It may seem as though this critique of Anzaldúa is unfairly harsh and that I am holding her responsible for issues that were matters of circumstance and historical context. It might be, for example, unfair to place such heavy emphasis on the failure of Vasconcelos’ theory to stand up to critical analysis, and to then use this failure to critique Anzaldúa’s entire project. However, reading Anzaldúa in this way serves as an important exercise that has allowed me to identify which parts of her theory will be able to “travel” and find their way into a new version of her *mestiza* consciousness. It has also shed light on areas of analysis that will need special attention. As I elucidate later in this piece, historicizing the new *mestiza* is very important to the process of her refiguring. That is another reason for having discussed Vasconcelos’ theory in such length – only by historicizing Anzaldúa and *her* precursors can we come to a broad understanding of the *mestiza*.

### **Refiguring the *mestiza***

In the previous section, I presented several weaknesses in Anzaldúa’s account of the new *mestiza*, showing that Anzaldúa does not always account for the fact that there are many junctures (theoretical and otherwise) at which she ends up reinforcing the very borders she wants to transgress and move beyond. Her exclusion of certain groups, such as whites, and her replication of the neo-indigenismo of the Chicano movement serve to undermine what she intends to be a project of uniting disparate groups and forging unlikely partnerships. For the remainder of this essay I address what a refiguration of the *mestiza* would look like. In order to broaden the *mestiza*’s “scope” as a sympathetic and identifying subject, I introduce similar theoretical hybrid figures and processes, drawing parallels and making important connections between the figures. I ultimately hope to show that all borderlands function in similar ways, whether they are concrete, political boundaries, or the borders that internally stratify one group. This function creates an in-between site at which resistance to borders is seeded. Finally, I reflect on the benefits and importance of utilizing postcolonial and feminist theories (among others) in this project.

In order to refigure the new *mestiza*, it is first important to understand the process by which the new *mestiza* consciousness takes hold. For her part, Anzaldúa presents a series of steps for the new *mestiza* as she begins her life of action. The first is to “take inventory”, looking at who she is and separating out which parts of her come from which of her disparate ancestors, before “putting history through a sieve”. After scrutinizing history and identifying lies, she “communicates the rupture” with oppressive traditions, “documents the struggle”, “reinterprets history”, and finally, “using new symbols, shapes



new myths” (*Borderlands* 104). Although she does not go into great detail when describing how this consciousness actually emerges, Anzaldúa recognizes that it is a very arduous process, and does not expect it to move quickly or easily. She is in fact familiar with the difficulty of such an endeavor, given that her intention in *Borderlands/La Frontera* is to mirror this process.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Anzaldúa’s project is, to use a term appropriated by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi, one of “theorizing”, which the latter define as “a practice that challenges Eurocentric [in Anzaldúa’s case, “Western” or binary modes of thought] theories’ claims while at the same time not giving in to naïve empiricism and documentarity with assumptions of transparent representation of reality” (“Thinking Through the Minor Transnationally” 12). The practice and process of “theorizing” is useful in understanding Anzaldúa’s project as it provides the theoretical rationale and means for rethinking her work.

In fact, I take my cue to refigure the *mestiza* from Anzaldúa herself, who makes it clear that it is not enough for the *mestiza* to straddle two or more cultures; she must create “a new consciousness.” This consciousness will be part of “a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (*Borderlands* 103). By Anzaldúa’s own formulation, therefore, there must be a questioning of basic concepts and precepts in order for this new consciousness to take hold. I suggest that a refiguring of Anzaldúa’s new *mestiza* constitutes exactly that process of questioning. In fact, Anzaldúa’s “theorizing” is a continuous process. In the same way, any understanding of the *mestiza* must also be a continuous process. The continuous nature of “theorizing” will also have important implications for the formation of alliances and the mobilization of resistance to domination and repression. As circumstances change, our conception of the *mestiza* shifts and changes and so do her alliances with other oppressed groups.

A recurring issue that must be addressed in any refiguring of the *mestiza*, however, is the very utopian nature of Anzaldúa’s vision. Although many critics agree with Anzaldúa in principle, they find it difficult to accept the “free floating alterity” of her *mestiza* subject (Pérez-Torres, “Alternate Geographies” 321). Despite this, most agree that “Chicano *mestizaje* represents a highly valued – but not unproblematic – conceptual tool in contemporary Chicano/a discourse” (335). However, critics including Rafael Perez-Torres, Jose David Saldivar, and Suzanne Bost, will insist on the historicization of any *mestiza* figure, particularly because of its potential. As Bost notes: “Despite its ambivalent history, *mestizaje* is an enabling concept because it suggests ways in which race dynamics in the United States could be reexamined with greater attention to such contradictions” (*Mulattas and Mestizas* 22).

One important characteristic of a refigured *mestiza* would be an expansion and inclusion of similar hybrid figures. Despite being steeped in racial history, the *mestiza* is, for the most part, inclusive of all races and as a result, ostensibly race-less. Just as Elleke Boehmer’s “double vision of the colonized” and W.E.B. DuBois’ concept of “double consciousness”, any refiguring of the new *mestiza* needs to expand “to accommodate the vast amalgam” (Singh and Schmidt “On the Borders” 29) she hopes to empower. In fact, as Suzanne Bost has noted, mixed identities such as the *mestiza*, *mulatta*, or *métis/se* challenge universalized notions of identity, a point that fits in neatly with this project. In addition to including (but not subsuming) other hybrid figures, the *mestiza* would have to

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<sup>8</sup> A cursory look at the structure of *Borderlands/La Frontera* shows that Anzaldúa mirrors the process she prescribes in her own work, suggesting that she sees herself as a vanguard of this movement.

consider bringing in other, less likely, and potentially more controversial figures. In her analysis, Anzaldúa has included homosexuals, for example, but does not overtly provide for those who identify as bisexual, transsexual, or transgender. For her own political reasons, she also does not include non-queer whites or straight men. A refigured *mestiza* would not necessarily have to be female, or Chicana. The only requirement levied on new *mestizas* would be their commitment to a feminist project, for, as Teresa de Lauretis understands the feminist subject, s/he is “*not unified or simply divided* between positions of masculinity and femininity, but *multiply organized* across positionalities along several axes and across mutually contradictory discourses and practices” (“Displacing Hegemonic Discourses” 136, her italics). This echoes Anzaldúa’s own assertion that “the struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one” (*Borderlands* 106) and stands as a significant reminder that one’s commitment to the feminist struggle is not an indicator of one’s sex or gender. As such “an inclusive paradigm, *mestizaje* can serve as a model for the fusions, negotiations, frictions, and border crossings between races in the Americas” (Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas* 8).

If Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* were to be broader and more inclusive, one defining characteristic would certainly be her transnational nature. According to Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi, the transnational “can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation from the center” (“Thinking Through the Minor” 5). This is echoed by Anzaldúa herself, who notes, “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (*Borderlands* 19). Anzaldúa, however, does not seem to provide for these other borderlands in her account of the *mestiza* consciousness, choosing instead to put the spotlight on the Chicano struggle and the borderlands created by the US-Mexico border. This absence is striking and in many ways, stands out as an important deficiency in her theory.

In order to fashion a more transnational *mestiza*, then, our understandings of borders must be more wide-ranging and extensive. It may be useful to consider Renato Rosaldo’s characterization of borders as “sites where identities and cultures intersect” (*Culture and Truth* 149) which are “always in motion” (217). This is interesting because he does not specify borders as physical locations – they could be, for example, internal to one individual. To me, this is the crux of the matter. What processes take place at these sites, and what implications could they have on this discussion of the *mestiza*?

### **Conclusions: Alternative Articulations of Hybridity**

Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, couched in postcolonial understandings of “self” vs. “other”, offers one answer. In the colonial context, the colonizers work to maintain their superiority over the colonized by employing and deploying Manichean dichotomies. This also serves to perpetuate the myth of purity (cultural, linguistic, genetic, and so on) and further elevates the colonizers above the colonized. However, Bhabha asserts an in-between third space of enunciation that is characterized by ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradictions. The nature of this Third Space, which is, as Bhabha famously describes it, teeming with potential, makes it impossible for the

production of purity to take place. The implications of this Third Space are disastrous for colonizers and unravel the myth of purity that defines them. Hybridity is thus “a productive third space of enunciation” which opens up sites of resistance against (colonial) domination (*The Location of Culture* 33). In fact, the hierarchal power relations that characterize colonial society outside the in-between space exist “laterally” within it, allowing connections and relationships that, on the outside, may seem tenuous, to flourish on the inside. As I have shown, this kind of lateral thinking is crucial to the *mestiza*.

Robert Young’s broad agreement with Bhabha’s conceptualization is rooted in the hybrid’s ability to challenge and resist dominant powers. However, as Singh and Schmidt have put it, Young “is wary of using such a term that has its historical foundations in racist discourses” (“On the Borders” 25) despite the attractiveness of hybridity’s “double logic which goes against the convention of rational either/or choices” (*Colonial Desire* 26).

Both Bhabha and Young’s articulations of hybridity seem appropriate in the context of the *mestiza*. This is because their analysis locates another space from which the *mestiza* can operate and opens up another position with which the *mestiza* can identify. The postcolonial framework in which they write is useful as it brings in another dimension from which to study the hybrid character of the *mestiza*. In particular, it allows for a stronger connection between the *mestiza* as a figure originating in a physical border and other figures which have their roots in a similar (post)colonial history but that do not live on a physical border. As such, postcolonial theory provides a bridge needed to link the *mestiza* and other oppressed figures or groups together.

Writing from a broadened concept of the postcolonial, Françoise Lionnet also theorizes a site at which resistance to domination is rooted in solidarity. She suggests that one important strategy in thinking past hegemony is the concept and practice of *métissage*. As she puts it: “We have to articulate new visions of ourselves, new concepts that allow us to think *otherwise*, to bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies that have governed the ground...*Métissage* is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental language of political action against hegemonic languages” (“The Politics and Aesthetics of *Métissage* 6). Lionnet’s formulation eerily echoes Anzaldúa’s, who writes:

“The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show...how duality is transcended...A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war” (*Borderlands* 102).

The similarity between Anzaldúa’s and Lionnet’s prescriptions can be found in the processes to which they refer. While Anzaldúa speaks of *mestizaje*, Lionnet conceptualizes *métissage*. Both terms denote processes that cannot be represented in English, as Lionnet herself has best elucidated. There is no English equivalent for either “*mestizaje*” or “*métissage*” as concepts that refer to the processes of the genetic, cultural, and linguistic intermingling that regularly take place at sites where differences are exposed to each other. In fact, in English, only the products of such mixing or

intermingling are named: “half-breed”, “mixed-blood”, “mixed-race”, and so on. There is no word for the process. As she puts it: “these expressions always carry a negative connotation, precisely because they imply biological abnormality and reduce human reproduction to the level of animal breeding” (“*Logiques Métisses*” 13).

As processes, both *mestizaje* and *métissage* remain unrepresented (or at least, under-represented) in language. Yet as concepts and practices, both function as political calls to action, insisting that the only way to be represented is through action that calls into question and interrogates the very motives of representation. One consequence of such action is a new kind of language, one in which the processes of *mestizaje* and *métissage* (and the individuals who exist as a result of such processes) recognize themselves in each other and join together in solidarity against the hegemonic processes of language and representation which would see them silent and unrepresentable once again. Lionnet suggests that *métissage* forms an important basis of solidarity, which she believes is the only way to fight liberation struggles. She also stresses the emancipatory value of *métissage*, both as a concept and as a practice. Indeed the *mestiza* is able to use her impure, mixed blood as a mode of resistance and emancipates herself from traditional restrictions.

In this way, and “understood as a dynamic model of relationality, *métissage* [and *mestizaje*] is ‘universal’<sup>9</sup> even if, in each specific context, power relations produce widely varying configurations, hierarchies, dissymmetries, and contradictions” (4). So *métissage* as a process takes into account that not all struggles are born out of or characterized by the same imbalance of power. In fact, the process of *métissage* operates equally well under varying degrees of hegemonic domination. Indeed, and similarly, the *mestiza* consciousness is able to “sustain contradictions” turning, as Anzaldúa puts it, “ambivalence into something else” (*Borderlands* 101). This “something else” Anzaldúa identifies remains unexplained despite its obvious importance as the outcome of an important process. I would like to suggest that it is in fact solidarity with other oppressions. The *mestiza* has an ability to see her struggle in others, and vice versa.

This ability and tendency on the part of the *mestiza* to stand in solidarity with other groups, despite the fact that she and these groups may not have a history of alignment and partnership, can best be explained by the process of identification. The process of identification is, as Diana Fuss puts it, “the detour through the other that defines a self” (*Identification Papers* 2). As such an identification is relational, inextricably connecting back to Lionnet’s claim about *métissage* as a model of relationality. But Fuss maintains that identifications do not constitute identity, nor do they stand against identity; rather, the work of identification helps and complicates the notion of identity. Here it is important to note that individuals can have more than one identification. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa identifies as a feminist, queer, Chicana, and *mestiza*, among other identifications. These identifications are not mutually exclusive of each other, nor are they interdependent. They are simply means of elucidating identity.

The process of identification provides an important framework for understanding how the *mestiza* and *métis(se)* subjects connect first to each other, and then to other marginalized and minoritarian groups. Equally important to this framework is the process

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<sup>9</sup> Lionnet clarifies her use of the term “universal” as “naming the practice of the women who write in the interstices between domination and resistance.” See “*Logiques Métisses: Cultural Appropriation and Postcolonial Representations*” 5.

of disidentification. Not to be understood as the mere “opposite” of the process of identification, disidentification works to distance oneself from a certain identifying character. A simple way of illustrating this is to return to the example I utilized above. While identifying as feminist, queer, Chicana, and *mestiza*, Anzaldúa also disidentifies with those women who perpetuate male hegemony over women. José Esteban Muñoz suggests disidentification as a strategy of resistance against dominant paradigms of identity. As he puts it, “Disidentification is a strategy that resists a conception of power as being a fixed discourse. Disidentification negotiates strategies of resistance within the flux of discourse and power” (*Disidentifications* 12). One important characteristic about disidentification as a strategy of resistance is that it does not function as a counter-stance, that is, it is not a reaction. On the contrary, Muñoz theorizes it as positive action. This positive action allows a move beyond traditional binaries, and it is in this move that its relationship with *mestizaje* and *métissage* can be found.

By utilizing both processes of identification and disidentification, the *mestiza* is able to reach out to other groups and broaden the way she conceives of her own identity. Recall that as a theoretical figure, the *mestiza* is not bound by categories of sex, gender, language, or location. She is, however, committed to a feminist project and, for the purposes of my discussion, couched in a decidedly postcolonial framework, with the understanding that the concept of the postcolonial is broader than its traditional definition.

Particular to both framings is the need to look to the past and recast history, in a manner quite similar to what Anzaldúa prescribes for her *mestiza*. Recall that one step towards the *mestiza* consciousness is to “put history through a sieve.” It is necessary, then, to historicize the *mestiza* and the process of *mestizaje*. As José David Saldívar reflects: “historical questions are inseparable from authentic self-understanding” (*Border Matters* 160), which is why, according to his account, history must be uncovered and represented – so that the *mestiza* can know herself.

Yet as Suzanne Bost sees it, the process of *mestizaje* “rests on a ‘foundation’ of multiple, shifting components yet remains attached to history, cultural specificity, and a powerful politics of resistance...*Mestizaje* often transcends its potentially tragic origins (conquest, rape, ‘the death of the subject’) and enables resistance to hegemony, a critique of imperialism, and powerful reinterpretations of self and culture” (20). Bost’s assessment is, as I see it, quite comprehensive, and accurately depicts the complex dynamic that characterizes the *mestiza*’s need to develop, beyond borders.

### **Brief Bio**

Zalfa Feghali is a PhD candidate in American and Canadian Studies at the University of Nottingham. Her thesis uses queer theory to articulate an alternative poetics and politics of contemporary citizenship and community building processes in North America, focusing specifically on poetry and performance art practices.

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